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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PINR PREL HK CH

SUBJECT: HONG KONG JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION AND LOCAL MEDIA  
REPORT THAT CHING CHEONG WILL STAND TRIAL AUGUST 15

CLASSIFIED BY: E/P CHIEF LAURENT CHARBONNET

**¶1. (C) SUMMARY:** "STRAITS TIMES" JOURNALIST CHING CHEONG IS SCHEDULED TO APPEAR IN THE BEIJING SECOND INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT ON AUGUST 15 FOR A TWO-DAY HEARING, THE INDEPENDENT HONG KONG DAILY "MING PAO" REPORTED AUGUST 14. THE NEWSPAPER SPECULATED THAT THE TRIAL WOULD BE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING CHING'S FAMILY. THE HONG KONG JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION (HKJA) TOLD POLOFF ON AUGUST 14 THAT IT HAD CONFIRMED RUMORS OF CHING'S TRIAL WITH MARY LAU, CHING'S WIFE, AND WAS IN THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING A CANDLELIGHT VIGIL FOR HIM ON AUGUST 15. ONE CONSULATE CONTACT SPECULATED THAT CHING MIGHT BE SENTENCED TO 4-5 YEARS, BUT THAT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT WOULD LEAVE OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF EARLY RELEASE THROUGH PAROLE. END SUMMARY.

COURT TO HEAR CHING'S CASE TOMORROW

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**¶2. (SBU)** ON AUGUST 14, THE INDEPENDENT HONG KONG DAILY "MING PAO" REPORTED THAT "STRAITS TIMES" JOURNALIST CHING CHEONG -- WHO GUANGDONG SECURITY AUTHORITIES ARRESTED ON APRIL 22, 2005 AND FORMALLY CHARGED WITH SPYING FOR TAIWAN -- WAS SCHEDULED TO APPEAR IN THE BEIJING SECOND INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT ON AUGUST 15 FOR A TWO-DAY HEARING. THE NEWSPAPER SPECULATED THAT THE TRIAL WOULD BE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING CHING'S FAMILY. MAK CHAI-MING, SPOKESPERSON FOR THE CHING CHEONG INCIDENT CONCERN GROUP, TOLD "MING PAO" THAT HE HOPED THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT WOULD ASSIST CHING; THE SECURITY BUREAU RESPONDED BY SAYING IT WOULD CONTINUE TO LIAISE WITH CHING'S FAMILY AND MAINLAND AUTHORITIES. CABLE TV NEWS REPORTED AUGUST 14 THAT CHING HAD HIRED TWO LAWYERS FROM GUANGDONG TO PREPARE FOR HIS TRIAL, BUT THAT EFFORTS BY ITS REPORTERS TO CONFIRM CHING'S TRIAL DATE HAD BEEN REBUFFED BY THE BEIJING SECOND INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT. ALSO ON AUGUST 14, MAVERICK LEGISLATOR LEUNG KWOK-HUNG "LONG HAIR" LED THE APRIL 5TH GROUP TO PROTEST OUTSIDE THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT LIAISON OFFICE, DEMANDING CHING'S EARLY RELEASE.

**¶3. (C)** KOK KAI FUNG, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE HONG KONG JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION (HKJA) TOLD POLOFF ON AUGUST 14 THAT THE HKJA HAD CONFIRMED RUMORS OF CHING'S TRIAL WITH MARY LAU, CHING'S WIFE. THE HKJA WAS IN THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING A CANDLELIGHT VIGIL FOR CHING, WHICH IT WOULD HOLD IN CHATER GARDEN THE EVENING OF AUGUST 15. KOK HAD NO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE LENGTH OF THE TRIAL OR WHETHER FAMILY MEMBERS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO ATTEND.

CONCERN OVER OUTCOME

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14. (C) JOSEPH CHENG, CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG PROFESSOR AND CIVIC PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL, TOLD US HE HAD HEARD RUMORS THREE MONTHS AGO THAT PRO-BEIJING FRIENDS OF CHING HAD MOBILIZED SUPPORTERS TO WRITE LETTERS TO THE BEIJING LEADERSHIP ASKING FOR LENIENT TREATMENT; THEIR IMPACT REMAINED UNCLEAR. MORE RECENTLY, CHENG'S SOURCES SPECULATED THAT THE "STRAITS TIMES" JOURNALIST MIGHT RECEIVE A HEAVY PENALTY OF 4-5 YEARS IMPRISONMENT, BUT THAT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT WOULD LEAVE OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF PAROLE OR EARLY RELEASE BASED ON MEDICAL REASONS. ANY EARLY RELEASE, HOWEVER, WOULD DEPEND ON CHING'S ATTITUDE DURING HIS COURT APPEARANCE, OPINED CHENG. A GUILTY PLEA AND REMORSE WOULD BRING LENIENT TREATMENT; A STRENUOUS DEFENSE COULD LEAD AUTHORITIES TO IMPOSE A HARSHER PENALTY AND BE EVEN LESS INCLINED TO PAROLE HIM. LIKE MANY OF OUR CONTACTS, CHENG SAID CHING'S CASE HAD BEEN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR BEIJING TO RESOLVE BECAUSE CHING WAS CONSIDERED A MEMBER OF THE PATRIOTIC COMMUNITY. SEPARATELY, CHENG SAID THAT THE PRO-PRC COMMUNITY IN HONG KONG HAD ACCUSED MARY LAU OF HARMING HER HUSBAND'S CASE BY "GOING PUBLIC."

INCREASED SPECULATION ON CHING'S CASE  
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15. (SBU) SPECULATION OVER CHING'S CASE HAS INCREASED IN RECENT WEEKS. LAST MONTH, MARY LAU MADE A VIDEO APPEAL TO MAINLAND AUTHORITIES URGING THEM TO RELEASE HER HUSBAND, WHO THEY HAVE DETAINED FOR MORE THAN 15 MONTHS WITHOUT TRIAL. ON JULY 20, THE HKJA, THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CLUB AND 20 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ORGANIZED PRESS CONFERENCES AND JOINTLY CALLED FOR CHING'S RELEASE.  
CUNNINGHAM